

# An anatomy of US policy

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USA  
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THE exposure of mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners has shocked the world and left the US position in Iraq in tatters. The process of erosion had, however, begun much earlier, beginning with the failure to find weapons of mass destruction, the rising tide of military casualties, and Spain's exit from the so-called "coalition of the willing".

Parallels to Vietnam are being drawn. While the resistance forces in Iraq can in no way be compared to the Vietnamese National Liberation Front in terms of ideological discipline or military organization, the refusal of the bulk of the US-trained Iraqi security forces to fight their own people is eminently laudable and is reflective of the integrity and commitment of the Iraqi people to fight for their freedom from foreign occupation.

The Iraqi people have forced the US to turn to Saddam Hussein's generals for help in Fallujah. It should not be surprising if it has to turn to Saddam Hussein himself to bail them out of the Iraqi quagmire. It would be fitting, indeed, if US lawlessness finds its nemesis in the land of Hammurabi, the world's first lawgiver.

The humiliation, torture and even rape and murder of Iraqi prisoners — exposed by enlightened and conscientious elements in the US army and media — are neither exceptional nor the first and not the worst. The treatment of pris-

tion asked in the US was "why do they hate us?", but such is the measure of self-righteousness of the establishment intelligentsia that few efforts have been made for critical analyses of its own policies and actions in the world. Of course, there are exceptional voices of reason and conscience, but they are voices in the wilderness and have failed to have an impact on mainstream public opinion or government policy.

The US-centricity of public opinion spans all political spectrums. Take, for instance again, the statement by Senator John Kerry, the Democratic contender for the presidency, asking if the death of hundreds of Americans in Iraq was "worth it". There is no questioning if the death of thousands of Iraqis was worth it. Earlier, Secretary of State Madeline Albright in the Clinton administration had responded

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One of the greatest qualities of the American people is the value they place on truth. Lying is considered more "sinful" than having committed other misdemeanours or transgressions. For such a people to now have a president and a government that is prone to compulsive lying is indeed tragic. It is now firmly established that the Bush administration lied blatantly about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The presentation that the US secretary of state, General Colin Powell, made before the UN Security Council on Iraq's WMDs was transparently spurious and he has now admitted it to be so.

Civilized norms would require that he resign, but that is too much to expect from the current administration. Even President Bush has admitted to the absence of WMDs, but has attempted to brush the issue under the carpet in the innocent garb of "intelligence failure". This may perhaps be acceptable to the American public, but will certainly not deceive the rest of the world.

The lawlessness of the US regime in the international arena now stands fully exposed. The detention without charge or trial under inhuman conditions of hundreds of prisoners at Guantanamo and the denial of basic rights and facilities required under the Geneva Conventions is a violation of all principles of justice. The US ridiculed the UN when it did not receive a mandate for war in Iraq and unleashed its armory despite the absence of international sanction. It has routinely trampled upon the laws of other sovereign states including

or nor the first and not the worst. The treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan has been no different. Reportedly, up to 3,000 surrendering prisoners were forced into sealed goods containers and loaded onto trucks for transport to Sheberghan prison.

During the four-day journey, the prisoners gasped for air and clawed at the skin of their fellow prisoners as they licked perspiration and even drank blood from open wounds to quench their thirst. Most of the inmates were dead on arrival. Survivors were shot. They lie buried in a mass grave. Reports confirm the presence of US personnel during the operation.

The instances reflect the cruelty of the US military-industrial complex and are symbolic of the manner in which it has treated and continues to treat the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

There has ensued an intense debate in the US over Iraq. That this is an election year provides added weight to these deliberations. Unfortunately, however, political discussions in the US tend to be rather superficial and also almost entirely US-centric.

There appears to be a signal inability of the American public to fathom the complexities of societies around the world or to care about the sufferings and miseries of other peoples caused by the actions of their governments. It is content to remain oblivious of what its government, its army or its intelligence agencies are doing in the rest of the world — until US casualties begin to occur. This interest too is sustained only as long as the crisis — defined largely in terms of US losses — lasts.

Take, for instance, the repeated assertions of the US president that terrorists, criminals and thugs are attacking the US because they are opposed to the freedom enjoyed by the American people. The insinuation is that there are people thousands of miles from US shores who make it their priority — over and above their own problems — to interfere with the freedom of the American people. Such an inane view from the leader of the sole superpower is incomprehensible. What is more incomprehensible and unfortunate, however, is that the American public at large has accepted this line.

The post-September 11, million-dollar ques-

with an unhesitant yes when asked if the death of thousands of children in Iraq as a result of the decade-long sanctions regime was worth it.

On the contrary, US officials are outraged by the actions of Iraqi resistance. The brutal murder and mutilation of four American civilians in Fallujah was, indeed, shocking. Paul Bremer, the US administrator in Iraq, rightly called it a despicable act. However, he needs to be reminded that when the US launched its attack on Iraq — and earlier on Afghanistan — and put on display what it proudly called its “shock and awe” offensive, thousands of men, women and children died and their bodies were burnt and mutilated likewise. Then too, arms and limbs were scattered all over the area. In essence, therefore, there is little difference between the actions of the US army and that of the Iraqi resistance.

US insensitivity to human death and destruction across the world is legendary. Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Palestine and Chile are historic testimonials to mass deaths perpetrated by the US and its collaborators. In fact, if a dozen odd men directly responsible for mass killings in the last 75 years are to be identified, US leaders a la Harry Truman, Robert McNamara, Henry Kissinger, Ronald Reagan, George Bush and Donald Rumsfeld would stand shoulder to shoulder with the likes of Adolf Hitler, Tojo Hideki, Pol Pot, Augusto Pinochet, Idi Amin, Ariel Sharon and Saddam Hussein.

The US neo-conservative militarist complex has not been kind to the American people either. It has little respect for human life and bases its decision on the cold calculus of cost-benefit analysis. Till recently, it has considered the average loss of one soldier a day in Iraq a low-cost operation for the sake of the objectives of global hegemony. Of the many haunting images of death and destruction in Iraq, one is of a wounded 19-year old American soldier on a wheelchair, minus a leg, an arm and his eyesight. The number of young American men and women who had promising lives ahead of them, but who will not date or dance or play baseball or swim again, because they are dead or maimed, is a sordid gift the American people did not deserve.

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Pakistan, and refused to submit to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. Under the circumstances, American protestations sound hollow. US officials have described Moqtada-as-Sadr's rebellion as a “power grab” — as an attempt to “take over the country by force”, and of having “no respect for the rule of law”. This would be laughable if it was not so tragic. For a country to have disregarded international law and occupied another country by force to make such accusations is indeed ironic.

Not surprisingly, US integrity and credibility is now severely dented. Where once it occupied the moral high ground, it has now fallen to the moral nadir. Thus, when US leaders speak of their efforts to bring freedom to the people of Iraq, it is rightly read by the world at large as the US corporations' quest for the freedom to exploit Iraq's oil wealth.

It is perhaps pertinent to try and understand as to why the US political system does not exhibit the enlightened respect for humanitarian principles and international law that is the hallmark of its northern neighbour, Canada, of European countries like Germany, Norway and Sweden, or of the people of Spain, Italy and the UK. The answer, perhaps, lies in the socio-economic composition of US society. The unfortunate fact is that there have emerged two USAs: one of the people and the other of the corporations.

The inequality between the two is manifested by the fact that the top one per cent of the population own as much national wealth as the bottom 96 per cent. There are individuals who own more wealth individually than one-third the US population combined, and the bottom 40 per cent of households own merely 0.2 per cent of the nation's wealth.

The two Americas have arrived at a *modus vivendi*, where domestic policy is primarily the domain of the people and foreign and defence policy is primarily the realm of Corporate America. The latter is governed, not by the lofty principles of the American constitution, but by raw greed. The US has variously dubbed other countries as the “Evil Empire” or the “Axis of Evil”. It is indeed tragic that Corporate America has now turned a great country into a “Hub of Evil”.